

About Wikigender

As a global online collaborative platform, Wikigender links policymakers and experts from both developed and developing countries to share knowledge and find solutions to advance gender equality. The platform focuses on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and in particular on SDG 5.

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Strengthening the role of women in rural and agricultural areas in the Mediterranean region: transforming challenges into opportunities

Synthesis of the Wikigender online discussion

About the online discussion

In the context of growing recognition of rural women's role to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Wikigender, the International Center for Advanced Mediterranean Agronomic Studies (CIHEAM) and the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) organised an online discussion on the topic "*Strengthening the role of women in rural and agricultural areas in the Mediterranean region: obstacles and opportunities*" from 17 to 21 September 2018.

Key outcomes

The Wikigender online discussion stressed four main challenges to rural women's empowerment:

- ◆ Legal restrictions on rural women's access to land ownership, as well as weak legal provisions and women's lack of legal literacy;
- ◆ Lack of educational and training opportunities;
- ◆ Persistent customary laws and discriminatory practices denying women's legal rights to land assets;
- ◆ Burden of unpaid care and domestic work that restrict rural women's empowerment opportunities.

Over 50 insightful and expert comments were posted which identified:

- ◆ The **challenges facing rural women**;
- ◆ **Policy recommendations** towards achieving the SDGs; and
- ◆ **Examples of good practices** to unlock rural women's empowerment.

Context

Leveraging rural women's potential will boost rural and agricultural development. Marginalising the role of women in rural development and agricultural strategies has created gender-blind policies and programmes. Rural women's needs have not been addressed, holding back rural women's contribution to inclusive growth and sustainable development. This is costly for the national economy: if women would have the same access to productive resources as men, farm yields could increase by 20–30% (FAO, 2011).

Mediterranean women already play a key role in rural and agricultural development:

- ◆ Women are responsible for the **majority of agricultural work**, controlling most of the non-monetary

economy such as subsistence agriculture, childcare and child education, household responsibilities, water and energy supply: 57% of women are engaged in agricultural activities in Morocco, 47% in Albania and 38% in Egypt (World Bank, n.d.).

- ◆ Women are a **major contributor to food and nutritional security**, to generating income and to improving the livelihoods and general welfare of households, particularly those with low incomes.
- ◆ Women are at the heart of the **resilience of rural societies** and their response to challenges in the Mediterranean region related to food security, the preservation of rural ecosystems, the sustainable natural resource management, climate change adaptation and agrobiodiversity conservation and issues of nutritional transition.

However, rural women's participation in economic, social and political life remains highly restricted in the Mediterranean area.

Rural women accumulate various forms of discrimination compared to urban women and rural men:

- ◆ They suffer from the **effects of marginalisation** of the territories. The SIGI country study in Burkina Faso

About the SIGI

The OECD's **Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI)** is a cross-country measure of **discrimination** against women in **social institutions** (formal and informal laws, social norms, and practices) across 180 countries.

The SIGI covers **four dimensions** of discriminatory social institutions: discrimination in the family, restricted physical integrity, restricted access to productive and financial resources and restricted civil liberties.

➔ www.genderindex.org

shows, for example, that 44% of the rural women live more than one hour away from basic water infrastructures (OECD, 2018a).

- ◆ They are particularly affected by **natural disasters and the effects of climate change** on agriculture and are the first to "absorb the shocks" of **food crises**: in the last decade, 90% of food crisis victims were women (Aguilar, 2004).
- ◆ They are subject to discrimination within the **social norms and customary laws** that govern their communities. Data from the Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI) showed that in one-third of the countries in the Mediterranean,

A policy-oriented discussion

The focus of the online discussion was threefold:

1. Understanding the situation of rural women:

- ◆ What is the role of rural women in sustainable development goals?
- ◆ What are the social, economic and environmental challenges facing rural women and girls?
- ◆ How to overcome barriers to empowering rural women?

2. Recommendations: achieving the Sustainable Development Goals:

- ◆ How can the 2030 Agenda be used to address the current challenges facing rural women?

3. Identifying what works:

- ◆ What are some examples of policies, programs or initiatives addressing barriers faced by women and girls in rural areas?
- ◆ What are the existing best practices to better integrate the gender dimension into agriculture and rural development?

This synthesis summarizes the main findings of the online discussion.

women do not have same rights to inherit land as men (OECD, 2018b).

- ◆ They are **under-represented in organisations and institutions** that play a key role in governing rural areas. For example, only 1.6% of women have been elected as representatives in rural councils in Sri Lanka and 31% in Pakistan (UNDP, 2010).



Understanding the situation of rural women

Women's equal access to land is grounded in core international human rights instruments, including the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).

Twenty years later, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) framework recognises women's secure access to land as a key pillar of women's economic empowerment. The international community has committed to secure, enforce and monitor progress on women's land rights in order to achieve the 2030 Agenda by including land-specific SDGs indicators (1.4.2¹ and 5.a.1²). The global community has been called upon to translate these international commitments into concrete national actions but this is proving difficult to achieve.

¹ Indicator 1.4.2 Proportion of total adult population with secure tenure rights to land, with legally recognised documentation and who perceive their rights to land as secure, by sex and by type of tenure

a Absence of property rights and lack of legal literacy

Several participants mentioned that in the Mediterranean region, **women's rights to access to land assets is restricted by discriminatory legal frameworks**. One participant highlighted that in Morocco, for instance, women and men do not have equal inheritance rights. Clauses covering inheritance in the Moroccan Family Code are based on the Sharia law, which entitles daughters to inherit only half of what sons do (Family Code, Articles 342-351; OECD, 2018b). As show by the SIGI, unequal inheritance rights persist in one-third of the Mediterranean countries (OECD, 2018b).

Moreover, participants stressed that **women rarely exercise their right to inherit land due to discriminatory practices and lack of legal literacy**. This is particularly the case regarding access to land among rural areas, where property is transferred according to a patrilineal model. Given that inheritance is the primary means through which women come to own land, these practices contribute to discriminating against women's access and ownership of land. Furthermore, married women often face social pressure to relinquish their share of inheritance to other male relatives of the family, such as brothers. Finally, most rural women do not know about their rights and have restricted access to justice. Consequently, conflicts are often solved by traditional or customary courts that apply discriminatory customary laws rather than non-discriminatory statutory laws.

Cultural and legal barriers partially explain women's restricted access to land: 15% of

² Indicator 5.a.1 - (a) Percentage of people with ownership or secure rights over agricultural land (out of total agricultural population), by sex; and (b) share of women among owners or rights-bearers of agricultural land, by type of tenure.

agricultural landholders in the Mediterranean region are women, compared to 4% in Algeria and Morocco, 7% in Lebanon, 11% in Spain and 30% in Italy (OECD, 2018b).

b Lack of educational and training opportunities

Access to education and training opportunities is crucial to the advancement of rural women and their communities. An extra year of primary school increases girls' eventual wages by 10-20%, encourages girls to marry later and have a better control and understanding of their own fertility, and makes them less likely to experience violence (The Chicago Council, 2011).

Gender gaps in access to education persist between rural and urban areas. Women make up over two-thirds of the world's people who are illiterate, and the majority of them live in rural areas (FAO, 2010). The global secondary school attendance ratio of rural girls is 39% (compared to 45% for rural boys, 59% and 60% for urban girls and boys respectively) (FAO, 2010).

Several factors impede rural women's access to learning and training opportunities:

- ◆ Education and training curricula and delivery are not always adapted to rural women's learning needs. Vocational education and training for rural women are often limited to a narrow range of female-dominated fields that reinforce their traditional roles and responsibilities;
- ◆ Social norms constitute a real barrier for women and girls' access to education in rural areas. As families tend to rely significantly on girls to help with household chores, such as cooking, cleaning and caring for

younger brothers and sisters, there are also higher opportunity costs for girls' education;

- ◆ Long distances to schools and training institutions, lack of public transport, lack of safe and accessible boarding, and sanitary facilities in schools/training institutions, as well as lack of female teachers and trainers, are factors which can greatly hinder rural women's education and training in rural areas;

c Discriminatory social norms restrict women's empowerment in rural and agricultural areas

The discussion provided an opportunity to discuss the role of **discriminatory social norms in rural women's empowerment**. As shown by the SIGI, discriminatory social norms and customary practices weaken the implementation of legal reforms and expose rural women to ongoing gender-based discrimination (OECD, 2014).

"In rural Tunisia, when the father passed away, the law provides widows and daughters with some inheritance rights. Women are able to claim their rights, by law, but in practice this is not the same story. Customary laws and practices provide more rights to the brothers of the deceased person. A woman claiming her rights is seen as traitor. Fear of reprisal and social stigma prevent women from inheriting. Women remain silent. This shows how women and girls internalise discriminatory social norms and practices, and accept inequality. This reflects the power of patriarchy".

Social expectations of women's role in society restrict their agricultural activities.

Discriminatory social norms restrict women's access to **means of production and agricultural equipment** including improved seeds, fertilizers, agricultural inputs, tools, ploughs, tractors and machines. For instance, in Burkina Faso, even if women have access to land, one in ten Burkinabe considers that only men should have access to seeds and agricultural fertilizers (OECD, 2018a). Cultural norms dictate how women and men **control and manage livestock**. While women are responsible for smaller animals such as poultry, pigs and sheep, men tend to keep and sell large animals such as camels, horses and cattle (FAO, 2009). Furthermore, women and men **undertake different agricultural tasks**. In

general, women are in charge of crop transportation, food processing and weeding, while men are responsible of operations such as land clearing and ploughing (FAO, 2009).

Social norms discriminating against rural women have domino effects.

Low female ownership and/or decision-making power over land and assets have been linked with increased vulnerability of women, higher levels of poverty, lower female household bargaining power, and reduced income-generating opportunities (FAO, 2011; OECD, 2014). Indeed, low female ownership of land and assets fosters an **"asset trap"** as these are often required as collateral from financial institutions, preventing women from obtaining credit and loans.

Box 4: Discriminatory social norms constrain women's access to land in the Mediterranean region



In **Egypt**, while women have equal legal rights to register land in their name, in practice this tends to be registered in the father's or husband's name (Quansah, 2012). Existing social and traditional norms often mean that women appoint male guardians to manage their land rights, such as their father or brother, particularly in rural areas and in Upper Egypt (Quansah, 2012).



In **Jordan**, there is evidence of discriminatory practices regarding the distribution of inheritance, such as among owners and male heirs choosing to leave a property undivided as a way of preventing female heirs from accessing their shares, particularly with regards to agricultural land. Furthermore, owing to fears that the inheritance will be passed on to the husbands of female relatives, fathers often transfer their properties to their sons while they are still alive, as a way of keeping the property within the family (Al-Dahdah *et al.*, 2016).



In **Malta**, stereotypical perceptions regarding the role of women are still perpetuated and remain a serious issue. Women are still considered to play a subordinate role to the male spouse concerning decision-making. As a result, there is evidence to suggest the existence of discriminatory practices that would potentially limit a women's legal right to the enjoyment and free use of her non-land and land assets (CEDAW, 2010).

d Female burden of unpaid care and domestic work

Women's greater share of time spent on unpaid care work restricts their contribution to rural development and reduces women's economic empowerment opportunities (Ferrant et al., 2014). Many participants agreed that because women have to juggle their household responsibilities with work in the field, their ability to dedicate time to agricultural activities is negatively impacted. Therefore, rural women engage in informal job settings to better balance their paid and unpaid responsibilities.

Box 5: The importance of reducing and redistributing women's unpaid care work has been mandated in the **Sustainable Development Goal 5.4** "Recognise and value unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies, and the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family as nationally appropriate."

The female burden of unpaid care work is exacerbated by reduced access to basic infrastructure and deeply embedded social expectations on female reproductive role in rural areas. **Across Mediterranean countries, women spend two to seven times more time on unpaid care work than men** (OECD, 2018b). Women spend 5.5 hours on unpaid care work in Turkey, 5.4 hours in Tunisia and 5.3 hours in Algeria (OECD, 2018b). These national averages mask disparities between rural and urban areas.

"In Egypt, 77% of Bedouin women work 10 hours per day, mainly on the following tasks: cleaning and rearing children (3 hours), fetching potable water (2 hours), cooking (3 hours), home breeding of sheep and poultry (2 hours)"

A participant pointed to the example of Burkina Faso, where rural women spend more than twice more time collecting wood and water per week than their female counterparts in urban areas (OECD, 2018a).

The participants agreed on **various factors leading to women's higher caring responsibility:**

- ◆ **Discriminatory social norms** viewing unpaid care and domestic work as a feminine prerogative.

"Among the Bedouin communities in Egypt, marketing and input purchase are men activities and social norms prohibit women to go to market to sell or purchase commodities and inputs"

- ◆ Rural Mediterranean woman have restricted access to basic **infrastructures and public services**, which facilitate the reduction of care work, thus exacerbating time constraints on rural women. Inadequate or unaffordable childcare service often results in a higher amount of time that mothers spend taking care of their children. The absence of proper electrification and water supply leads to women spending more time fetching firewood and collecting water.



Recommendations: achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

a Implementing gender equitable laws, policies and programmes in rural and agricultural areas

Legal reforms are the first step to protecting rural women's rights and promoting gender equality as called by Sustainable Development Goal 5.1.1 Indicator.³

- ◆ Eliminating discriminatory inheritance laws and legal provisions is crucial to securing women's and girls' access to land assets;
- ◆ Harmonising customary laws with national laws in line international human rights' commitments was highlighted as a priority area to significantly improve women's land rights in the Mediterranean region.

To overcome the negative influence of discriminatory social norms, **legal reforms need to be accompanied by long-term interventions** such as awareness-raising campaigns and community dialogues to ensure full acceptance of harmonisation between customary law and statutory law.

Several participants suggested that **policy makers should implement gender mainstreaming to close gender gaps in access to resources land assets.** It was highlighted that that a gender perspective must be integrated in the preparation, design, implementation and evaluation of policies, programmes and projects for agriculture and rural development. Moreover, agricultural policies play an important role in improving rural women's access to infrastructure, services, resources, assets and social protection

³ Whether or not legal frameworks are in place to promote, enforce and monitor equality and non-discrimination on the basis of sex.



What can governments do?

- ✓ Eliminate discriminatory legal provisions;
- ✓ Harmonise customary laws with national legal frameworks;
- ✓ Ensure that women have access to information about their land rights and guarantee women's access to adequate justice mechanisms;
- ✓ Provide accessible, available, affordable and gender-responsive access to land rights enforcement mechanisms.

b Investing in girls' education in rural and agricultural areas (CIHEAM)

Investment in infrastructures and better access to flexible school scheduling have been proven to increase school attendance and completion by rural girls.

- ◆ Participants highlighted the importance of holistic and gender-sensitives approaches in education including the provision of safe school facilities and separate sanitation facilities; safe and gender-friendly transport to schools and/

"To overcome the barriers facing rural women, a Gender Needs Assessments should be conducted to provide programmes and policies consider rural women deprivation from services as education, health and entertainment facilities that imposed by the geographic isolation and tradition values that prohibit women from easy mobility"

or building of schools in strategic locations near underserved areas;

- ◆ Scheduling school times and hours that allow for seasonal agricultural or household work.

Trainings and incentives for teachers and improvement in the curricula also play a critical role.

- ◆ Providing gender-awareness training and incentives for teachers (including female ones) to work in rural areas;
- ◆ Improving curricula that respond to rural realities, such as combining agricultural training with conventional subjects.

Finally, governments need to take action to **challenge discriminatory practices against women and girls in education.**

- ◆ Raising parents' awareness about the importance of educating girls;
- ◆ Providing legislation and school rules against sexual harassment.

c Challenging discriminatory social norms to empower rural women and girls

One participant suggested that **combatting discriminatory social norms and practices is essential to ensure implementation of legal reforms** promoting rural women's rights and reducing ongoing gender-based discrimination in rural and agricultural areas.

Shifting discriminatory social norms in rural and agricultural areas is possible:

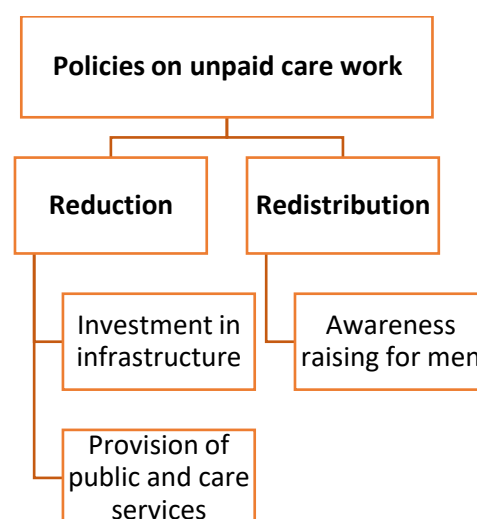
- ◆ Implementing gender-transformative approaches and actions in agriculture and rural development at all levels;
 - Supporting women's access to non-traditional occupations and new sectors in agriculture;

- Addressing gender inequalities at the household level through innovative training sessions;

- ◆ Fostering a dialogue with community, local, religious leaders, young men and boys on key gender issues. For instance, local platforms have the power to improve rural women's visibility and highlight the negative impact of traditional gender relations and roles in rural areas;
- ◆ Conducting community awareness-raising programmes and projects about the issues of child marriage and adolescent pregnancy;
- ◆ Enhancing rural women's political and civic participation in national, regional and governance mechanisms.

d Reducing the burden of rural women's unpaid care work

Government, communities and international organisations need to be engaged to lift the constraint on women's time use. This can be done through two channels: reducing women's time spent on unpaid care work and redistributing domestic tasks between men and women.



To reduce the burden of unpaid care work for women, it is important for countries to **invest in infrastructure and public care services in rural areas**. Better electrification, improved access to water and expanded rural transport network ease

the constraints on women's time. Similarly, better access to childcare services and care for the elderly will also reduce the time women spend on domestic care. Expanding school hours enables women to replace time spent on child care with more productive activities.

To redistribute the time spent on care and house work between women and their domestic partners, **traditional masculinities need to be challenged**. Policy makers are advised to provide trainings and awareness-raising campaigns targeting men to re-adapt their attitude towards shared responsibilities in the household and to promote volunteering to share care and housework with their female counterparts.



Identifying what works

Egypt: Creating Safe and Women-Friendly Workplaces Programme (WEPP)

◆ Context

Agriculture can be an important engine of growth and poverty reduction in Egypt. Yet, the sector is underperforming in part because women, who are a crucial resource in agriculture and the rural economy in general, face specific constraints that hinder their potential productivity throughout the agricultural value chain, such as:

- ✓ Socially prescribed gender roles;
- ✓ Unequal gender division of labour;
- ✓ Widespread gender-based discrimination in the workplace.

◆ Objectives

The WEPP aimed at:

- ✓ Improving women's access to secure and decent employment opportunities;
- ✓ Fostering a more gender-inclusive work environment in the agricultural value chains, improving both women's access and agency in the workplace;

- ✓ Recognising care and domestic responsibilities of workers (both women and men).

◆ Target audience

The project was implemented in Giza, Beni Suef and Minya and succeeded in stationing around **225** women at 10 rural firms.

◆ Solutions

Supporting women's agency in the workplace: the participating companies developed innovative training schemes aimed to strengthen women's soft skills, such as negotiation, communication and presentation skills, supporting women in building both personal and professional competencies. As a result of such trainings, women reported to be better positioned in asserting their rights to access paid work when these rights were questioned by their spouses and/or siblings.

Challenging gender stereotypes in the workplace: Participating agribusiness companies implemented several activities addressing women workers' issues and needs within their communities too. Those activities aimed to address the cultural barriers, prevailing gender roles and stereotypes in the community. Innovative tools and approaches were used, such as interactive theatre sessions and sports days for change, giving women the space to express themselves and to discuss their rights and needs openly with their men co-workers, husbands and relatives.



Fostering a more open communication between workers and the management: Initiatives included the installation of new communication channels and complaining systems at the workplace in order to improve women's participation in voicing the issues they face on the workplace. Labour committees were also established. Those committees (whom the majority of members are women) have been very vocal in conveying workers' demands and managed to achieve significant improvements (including an increase in the base salary; improvement to working conditions; or provision of childcare on-site).

Jordan, Morocco and Lebanon: Skills for Success – Employability Skills for Women

◆ Context

High unemployment rates have persisted in Jordan, Morocco and Lebanon for decades, affecting more women than men. Across these countries, unemployment rate for female youth is nearly double that of male youth, being the highest gender gap in employment in the world (ILO, 2011).

◆ Objectives

The project provided disadvantaged, unemployed, secondary-level educated women with the necessary skills, knowledge and tools to enter the labour market.

◆ Target audience

The project trained over 300 young women in Jordan, Morocco and Lebanon.

◆ Solutions

The project contributes towards the development of the participants' employability skills by providing English language training, job search tools and advice, and enhanced professional abilities, including confidence, computer and business skills.

An impact assessment showed that among the trainees:

- ✓ 40% of the job seekers has been placed in formal jobs;
- ✓ 39% has chosen to enrol in university studies.

A second phase of the project will target other countries such as Egypt and Tunisia.

Reducing the burden of rural women's unpaid care work:

Colombia: Community Nursery Programme

◆ Context

Women's burden of unpaid childcare work and children malnutrition were serious problems in Colombia, especially among the poor communities in rural areas. Women's higher time spent taking care of their children leads to lower number of time for other productive activities.

◆ Objectives

The programme aimed to promote women's employment, reduce mothers' burden on unpaid childcare work and enhance children's nutrition.

◆ Target audience

Mothers and children of poor neighbourhoods in the rural areas of Colombia.

◆ Solutions

The programme took place during 1984-1986. Children under the programmes received food and childcare services provided by a mother in the community. The villages' parent associations selected a group of women who would be responsible to take care of up to 15 children at their home. Children under the program received meals and childcare services.

Among different outcomes, the programme had positive impacts on women's employment and number of hours of work:

- ✓ Women earned a stable income working as the caregivers;
- ✓ Mothers who sent their children to the care centres increased their working time by 75 hours per month.

Bhutan: Sustainable Rural Electrification Project

◆ Context

In Bhutan, electricity distribution is limited, especially in rural areas. In 1997, 80% of the population, mainly in rural areas, did not have access to electricity. Rural women were negatively impacted as they faced a time burden collecting fuelwood for the family.

◆ Objectives

The project aimed to expand electricity in the rural zones of Bhutan, decrease electricity cost, create employment and reduce women's time burden on unpaid care work.

◆ Target audience

Population in the rural neighbourhood of Bhutan.

◆ Solution

During 2000-2006, the project provided electricity to 6000 new rural consumers. Women were among the beneficiaries of the project: their time spent on collecting firewood has been reduced by 28 minutes per day.

Global: MenCare – a global fatherhood campaign

◆ Context

Across countries, childcare is deemed to be the main responsibility of women. Getting men involved in taking care of the children benefits women, children and men themselves.

◆ Objectives

The campaign aims to promote men's role within the family as non-violent fathers and caregivers.

◆ Target audience

Fathers in 45 countries on five continents.

◆ Solutions


The programme has been led by Promundo and Sonke Gender Justice since 2011 and expanded to over 45 countries. In Guatemala, for instance, trainings were provided for 630 fathers. Dramatic changes in fathers' attitudes towards men and women's roles and responsibilities within the family were observed. Upon completing the programme:

- ✓ 30% of the participants agreed that "changing a baby's diaper is not just a woman's responsibility" ;
- ✓ 25% believed that "an unemployed father could also be a responsible father"

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Box 8: Social Media Impact

 [#RuralWomen](#): On Twitter, **30 people** participated in our online discussion. There were over **12, 000** impressions of our tweets.



- ✓ From 17 to 21 September, Wikigender had **3700** page views.
- ✓ It had more than **10, 000** active users.
- ✓ The five top visitors of our page were from India, United States, Mexico, United Kingdom and South Africa.



For more details, sources of information and to read all contributions to the online discussion, please see the online discussion page on Wikigender: bit.ly/2wGSxMR

Stay tuned via Wikigender for future discussions! http://www.wikigender.org/index.php/Online_Discussions

Any questions, suggestions of online discussions? Email us at contact@wikigender.org

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